

Turn Back To God

Malachi

MEMORY VERSE

MALACHI 2:17

“You have wearied the LORD with your words; yet you say, ‘in what way have we wearied Him?’ In that you say, everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,’ or ‘Where is the God of justice?’”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Pink construction paper, scissors, a marker, magazine pictures of toys, etc. pre-cut before class.

As many copies of the “Memory Verse Decoding” template as children in your class.

ATTENTION GETTER!

“What’s In Your Heart” Object Lesson

We are going to be learning today that what is in our hearts is important to God when we worship Him. Before class prepare two large hearts (1 foot x 1 foot) from pink construction paper. Write “Jesus” in large letters on both hearts. During the week cut out pictures from magazines of things that children do or play with (example: toys, TV, video games, computers, friends, pets, etc.).

When class begins pull out one of the hearts. Explain that this heart represents our hearts. Jesus lives inside of our hearts, but sometimes during the week other things can get into our hearts. Begin to paste on the magazine cutouts with glue stick covering the name of Jesus. When all of the pictures are glued on, explain to the children that sometimes other things become more important than worshipping Jesus and after a while Jesus can be forgotten. This is what happens to the nation of Judah in our lesson today. God wanted them to return to Him with their hearts. God wants us to worship Him with our whole hearts. There should be no room in

our hearts for anything else other than Jesus. If there is, we just need to turn back to Jesus and He will cleanse our hearts again. With the second pink heart glue and cover over the heart with the magazine pictures on it. Say, "Let us look at what God has to say to a people who had a lot of other things in their hearts besides the Lord."

LESSON TIME!

Malachi is the last of the Minor Prophets and closes out the Old Testament. The Jews had returned from captivity in Babylon and have been in the land for about 100 years. The people under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah had turned to God and worshiped Him. They rebuilt the temple that was destroyed by the Babylonians and rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem.

But the revival did not last very long. After only a few years the nation of Judah began to turn back to their old ways of sin. God raised up a man from the tribe of Levi named Malachi to speak to His people. God wanted His people to turn back to Him. God's people were going through the motions of serving Him, but their hearts were not in it. Kind of like if we come to church every Sunday and sing worship songs and listen to the Bible lessons, but our hearts and our minds are somewhere else. We need to remember that **God wants our hearts to be right when we worship Him.**

The words that the Lord gave to Malachi and that are recorded for us in His book are the last words spoken by God in the Old Testament. After this prophecy the Lord is silent for 400 years until the prophet John the Baptist is raised up by God to bring in the time of the Messiah.

MALACHI 1:9-14

"But now entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your

hands, will He accept you favorably?” says the LORD of hosts.

“Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you,” says the LORD of hosts, “nor will I accept an offering from your hands.

For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations,” says the LORD of hosts.

“But you profane it, in that you say, ‘The table of the LORD is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.’

You also say, ‘Oh, what a weariness!’ and you sneer at it,” says the LORD of hosts. “and you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?” says the LORD.

“But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and takes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished— for I am a great King,” says the LORD of hosts, “and My name is to be feared among the nations.”

These first verses that we are going to look at is God speaking to the priests of Malachi’s day. They are the leaders of the people. They continued to burn sacrifices and do all of the religious things that they were supposed to do, but their hearts were very far from God.

They thought that they were OK by doing different rituals, but God said that He would not accept their offerings.

They would go to the temple and make their sacrifices yet live their lives the way that they wanted to. The priests were also selfish in that they would keep the good animals for their own gain and bring the sick or lame animals to sacrifice to the Lord. They were not bringing in their best.

God even says that the Gentiles who do not worship the true God will sacrifice to their gods better sacrifices. God's people would even talk among themselves and say that serving God is "weariness" and they would talk bad about God's sacrifices and the things that He wanted the people to do.

How sad it is to think that people can "act" like they are serving God when they are really only serving themselves. We also have to be careful because we can fall into the same trap. We need to examine our hearts to make sure that we have a real relationship with Jesus and are not just going through the motions. **God wants our hearts to be right when we worship Him.**

MALACHI 2:7-9

"For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

But you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of hosts.

"Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people, because you have not kept My ways but have shown partiality in the law."

Again, God is describing here the disobedience of the leaders of God's people during this time. He says that the priests should be the ones who are teaching the Word of God to the people. That the words contained in the Holy Scriptures should be what the leaders are speaking. He even calls them a messenger of the LORD, but the leaders were not teaching God's Word to the people. In fact, the things that they were saying were making the people stumble and sin! How sad that the leaders were leading the people away from God. God also says that He would judge them because they did not faithfully teach the people His Word.

Being a teacher is a very important responsibility before God. People today who are leaders and teachers in God's church need to be careful to make sure that they are teaching God's Word only and not their own opinion. God will always bless His Word and those who faithfully teach it. **God wants our hearts to be right when we worship Him.**

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

The nation of Judah did not have good leaders. They were more interested in their own gain than in the spiritual health of the people. Play this variation of "Red Light/Green Light" to remind the children about false teachers and "wolves in sheep's clothing."

Before class, choose one child secretly and tell them that they will be the wolf. Do not let anyone else in the class know. Tell the class that they are going to play a game of "Red Light/Green Light." But the only problem is that someone in the group is a wolf. They do not know who it is and the wolf looks like everyone else. When you say "green light" all of the children should move forward. When you say, "red light" all of the children should stop. The wolf will then be able to take one additional step and tag as many children as they can. The wolf will then be revealed and play will continue until either the wolf tags all of the players or someone has made it

to the finish line. Give instructions to the child who is the wolf that they should try to tag as many other children as possible.

Sit down with the children and explain that in Malachi's time, like today everyone who says that they are one of God's leaders does not always have a heart after God. We need to be careful that they are not "a wolf in sheep's clothing." Ask, "What are some ways that we can tell who are really God's leaders and who are wolves?" Some possible answers are that true leaders will teach God's Word. What they say will line up with God's Word. They will love the people. They will demonstrate the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Just as the wolf in the game was revealed God has His ways of eventually revealing who are His teachers and who are not.

MALACHI 3:6-12

"For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?'

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings.

You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation.

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such

blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.

“And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” says the LORD of hosts;

And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land,” says the LORD of hosts.

God is now addressing His people. He recounts their history of straying away from Him, but assures them that if they would simply return, He would return to them. God is patient and loving toward His people Israel, just as He is toward us. God is never the one who leaves, but sometimes we drift away from Him and His plans for our lives. God is so faithful! When we realize that we have left His side, we can always return to Him.

Then God shares with the people concerning their disobedience in the area of giving. He says that the people have robbed God. He says that how the people have robbed God is in the area of tithes and offerings. In fact they removed themselves from God’s blessing because they refused to be faithful in their giving to God. Apparently the people were refusing to bring tithes and offerings from their increase to the Lord as He had commanded.

The people wanted to keep the money for themselves and spend it however they wanted to. The interesting thing is that God never needed their money. How they used their money indicated what was in their hearts. Because they would refuse to part with money it showed that money was more important in their hearts than God was. Giving serves the same purpose today. We give to the work of the Lord because we love Jesus and are responding to His love for us.

The people must have felt like they were putting their money into pockets with holes. They were not enjoying the fruits of their labors. Their greed had caused them to not be able to enjoy their resources. God also told them to test them in this area. This is the only place in the Bible that God says to “test” him. He tells them that if they would be obedient in the area of giving and do it from their hearts that He would greatly bless them.

It is also true for us today. In any area of our lives, when we choose to be obedient to the Lord we will be greatly blessed. God promises that if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness that He would provide for all of our needs (Matthew 6:33). God desires to bless His children. It does not mean that we will always have everything we want, but it does mean that we will always be cared for in every way. **God wants our hearts to be right when we worship Him.**

MALACHI 3:13-15

“Your words have been harsh against Me,” says the LORD, “Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’

You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts?

So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free.’”

The people were also disobedient in how they spoke to one another about God. It is interesting that the people seemed to be guilty of the same things that the leaders were. The leaders held back the sacrifices and did not give the best. The people were holding back on their tithes and offerings. The leaders were speaking badly of

the Lord and not faithfully teaching His Word. The people were also talking about how it was a waste of time to serve God and why bother serving God.

God's people needed to repent, but the leaders needed to as well and really should have taken the lead in repenting. They were robbing themselves of God's blessing. He desires to help His people, but He also wants His people to worship Him from their hearts and not just go through the motions.

We also need to look in our hearts and ask ourselves why we serve God. Is it because we feel like if we do certain "religious" things that we will go to heaven? Or is it because Jesus lives inside of our hearts and we love Him with all of our heart and want to give Him all of our life? **God wants our hearts to be right when we worship Him.**

MALACHI 3:16-18

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.

"They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him."

Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

Malachi's message must have really stirred the people, especially those people who really loved the Lord and did worship Him from a pure heart. As they shared with one another we are told that the

Lord listened. Is that not such a comfort to know that the Lord listens to us?

So the Lord begins to keep a book of remembrance. It was for all those who feared Him and meditated on His name. There must have been a certain group who did serve Him from their hearts. God knows who are really His and He is longing to bless those who are serving Him with the right heart. He even says that He will one day make them His jewels.

It is such a blessing to see what comes from a life of obedience. If we would only listen to the Lord's Word and obey Him our lives will be so very blessed now as well as in the life to come. There is nothing else that can compare to this life in Jesus. We can start at any time by just asking Jesus to come into our hearts. Then our names will be written in the Book of Life and a book of remembrance will be kept for us.

It kind of makes you think of a loving father who keeps a journal of all of the special moments that he has with his children. God keeps track of all of those special times with Him. He knows His children and desires to bless us. **God wants our hearts to be right when we worship Him.**

MALACHI 4:1-3

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the LORD of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch.

But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.

You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,” says the LORD of hosts.

In the final chapter of Malachi we have a prophecy of the Second Coming of Jesus. We are told that there is a day coming that will be burning like an oven. This day will be a Day of Judgment for those who do not have their names written in the Book of Life. They will spend their eternity separated from God.

For those who belong to God our eternity will be filled with being in the presence of God. Jesus is returning for His people, you and I if you know Jesus. He will establish His kingdom here on this earth and we will live with Him forever. What a wonderful day that will be. Come quickly Lord!

Memory Verse Decoding

Use the enclosed template. You will need to make one copy for each child. Follow the directions on the sheet.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer asking the Lord for a fresh filling of His Holy Spirit to help them to live their lives in obedience to the Lord, from their hearts.

If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity to do so.

Template – Memory Verse Decoding

Mixed in with today's memory verse you will find all kinds of other things that can fill our hearts. Using the code at the beginning of each phrase, cross out that number of words and skip the next. What will remain is today's memory verse. For example: If the code is 3-3-2 then you would cross out 3 words, circle the next word, cross out the next 3 words, circle the next word and cross out the next 2 words and circle the next word. Continue in this pattern until the memory verse remains.

(Code 3-3-2)

candy toys games You dog cat turtle have video TV wearied candy
friends play the gum cake cookies Lord bicycle roller-blades with
football baseball soccer your toys cat TV words

(Code 1-2-3)

video Yet computer cookies you bicycle turtle hamster say cake In
roller-blades soccer what dog toys baseball way games have friends
play we gum TV football wearied computer Him

(Code 3-1-2)

football bicycle toys In hamster that computer cake you cookies
candy dog say gum everyone video baseball who games toys candy
does baseball evil cookies bicycle is roller-blades TV games good
hamster in toys cat the dog hamster turtle sight candy of games
football the games gum computer Lord TV and toys candy He
roller-blades baseball cookies delights cake in TV toys them